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TAGS: [PREL](#) [VT](#) [CH](#)
SUBJECT: HOLY SEE: FOREIGN MINISTER SAYS "NO PROGRESS" IN RELATIONS
WITH CHINA (C-AL6-01115)

REF: VATICAN 123

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Sandrolini, Charge d'affaires a.i.,
EXEC, State.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Vatican FM-equivalent told charge July 28 that Celli's recent trip to China had ended without any progress in Holy See-PRC relations. It is not clear whether China will proceed with further illicit ordinations of bishops. The Holy See will probably send another envoy to China by the end of this year; China has asked for a cardinal but this will occur only if that envoy is given access to Hu Jintao. The Holy See remains convinced that Hu wants an improvement in relations but officials below him are blocking progress. The Vatican is grateful for past USG assistance with China but thinks it better to proceed on its own, in a low-key way. End summary.

¶2. (C) Archbishop Giovanni Lajolo (Vatican foreign minister equivalent) confirmed to Charge July 28 that Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli (accompanied by Monsignor Gianfranco Rota-Graziosi) had indeed been to Beijing for talks earlier in July, as was widely reported. Lajolo said there had been no progress at all. Things got so bad that at one point Celli told the Chinese that, the way things were going, he had no choice but to pack his bags and leave. He stayed, but found the Chinese to be unwilling to budge. Celli had a somewhat better meeting with the Vice Foreign Minister (the same one, said Lajolo, who came to Rome last year); afterwards other Chinese officials told him to forget what they had said and remember only what the Vice Foreign Minister had said.

¶3. (C) Lajolo said the Chinese told ("threatened") Celli that since China's Catholic community urgently needed 20 new bishops, the authorities would have to go ahead with some further (illicit) ordinations; Lajolo said only "we'll see". He emphasized that the Holy See wants nothing to do with the so-called Patriotic Association.

¶4. (C) In response to a question, Lajolo said that Cardinal Ivan Dias was just getting started at the Propaganda Fide dicastery -- which is responsible for evangelization in non-Christian areas -- but in that context would certainly also play a role regarding China. Propaganda Fide has the lead on questions of acceptable bishops; some potential Chinese candidates, said Lajolo, would indeed be acceptable.

¶5. (C) Lajolo said the Holy See believes that Premier Hu Jintao wants, and is ready for, improvement with the Holy See, but below his level there's significant resistance. China has asked the Vatican in the past to send a cardinal to visit; the Holy See preference is to do so only if that cardinal would be able to meet Hu, and hear from his own lips China's policy. Lajolo said nevertheless that another Vatican visit to China was likely by the end of this year, but perhaps by Cardinal Etchegaray or someone else (rather than Celli). Lajolo said that while the Holy See has appreciated past USG help in China, that help has in fact irritated the Chinese; thus, he said, the Holy See would

prefer to work directly with China in a low-profile way for the time being.

¶6. (C) Comment: The Holy See has preferred to keep the Celli channel quiet; deputy PM Parolin disavowed knowledge of it to us just prior to the trip itself, and wide public speculation about Celli's trip was never officially acknowledged by the Vatican. Lajolo's implication that the next envoy will be someone else may reflect a feeling that Celli has become too high profile. It may also be convenient to send the retired Etchegaray, in a role he's performed before, since any visit could be clothed in an innocent purpose such as observing an important anniversary or attending an exhibition. That would also lessen any expectations about the outcome. As far as progress in the relationship itself, we hope that China will not in fact proceed with any further ordinations, as each such episode would be a provocation to the Holy See.

SANDROLINI